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SPEECH

OF

Prof. Francis L. Patton, DD., LLD.

PRESIDENT-ELECT OF PRINCETON COLLEGE

AT THE

ANNUAL DINNER

OF

The Princeton Club of New York.

MARCH 15, 1888.

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In introducing the President-elect, DR. VAN DYKE, President of the Club, said, in part :

There were nine colleges in this country before the Revolution ; four of them are represented here to-night. Among them all none has rendered a more constant and loyal service to our national life than Princeton : nor has she ever done a better thing for the Republic than to bring, as we confidently hope and expect, a new and worthy recruit to its citizenship, a philosopher, (and therefore a patriot), a peer of Witherspoon and McCosh.

Princeton stands on middle ground, geographically, religiously and educationally, and, I think, it is safe to say that her alumni want her to hold that position. They don't want her to undertake either a radical revolution or a narrow re-action into a Presbyterian boarding-school.

There has been, of late, a little too much unrest and fidgetiness and irresponsible experimenting among the colleges. It is good to have a few where the atmosphere is more serene, where the foundations are regarded as fixed, and where a man can send his sons, not to be experimented upon, but to be trained to think clearly and act rightly. Princeton has always held that this can best be done in a college which is distinctly Christian, and quite as distinctly non-sectarian, and where the classics, philosophy and

mathematics are regarded as essential to a liberal education. That is the sum total of her conservatism,—

“ Not clinging to some ancient saw,
Not mastered by some modern term,
Not swift nor slow to change, but firm ”—

that is Princeton, our Alma Mater, and, we trust, the Alma Mater of our sons.

Now, there is one man here to-night to whom all this desire and this hope makes us turn with the warmest feelings,—the man charged with a double task and equal, as we believe, to both. One task is of his own choice, or perhaps he was predestined to it, namely, the task of showing “the Oughtness of Metaphysics.” The other task touches us more closely, it has been imposed upon him by that power which ranks next to predestination, namely, the Board of Trustees, which is the task of making Princeton the great University of the Middle States. In this task, sir, you will get cart-loads of advice. We have not a word of it for you to-night, but only a cordial, sincere, unanimous welcome for our President-elect, Francis L. Patton.

Professor FRANCIS L. PATTON, spoke as follows :

I was told the other day that a gentleman in this city, distinguished in many ways, but particularly distinguished as an after-dinner speaker (I will not mention his name, though I may take the liberty to remark that many of us, I am very sure, would be glad to see him made the next President of the United States), said that the coming President of an American College must be possessed of two qualifications; he must be able to live in a sleeping-car and partake with impunity of the regulation pastry of the railroad station. As this is the first time I have ever ventured to testify in my own behalf, I may be allowed to say, that severe as these conditions seem to be I am ready to meet them. (Cheers.) The second qualification I am disposed to construe with

some degree of latitude, and suppose that among the gastronomic feats that will be imposed upon me, an appreciative enjoyment of the delightful hospitality of the Princeton Club will most certainly be included.

There is, however, a third qualification, respecting which I can only confess my shortcoming: I do not know how to make an after-dinner speech. This is not from inattention to the subject or any indifference on my part. I read the papers and watch eagerly for everything that falls from the lips of the few post-prandial orators whom I fain would take as my models. I have even asked Dr. van Dyke to give me a few useful hints, but with that wise caution, which leads a man, when he has a good thing, to hold on to it, he evaded my inquiry, or rather, disguised his flat refusal with a compliment. Then I thought, perhaps, that I might send over to some of my clerical brethren and ask them to lend me a sermon for the occasion, for I have been told that after all the main thing in an after-dinner speech is to be amusing. (Laughter.) But the recent storm has cut me off from all communication with my friends, and I appear before you to-night dependent entirely upon my own resources. (Applause.) In this respect it is quite possible I may differ with some who may follow me, but it is enough to explain the fact that my speech will be a poor one.

Mr. Lecky says that the world is governed by its ideals, and as the ideal is very apt to be a very different thing from the real, this is probably the last chance I shall ever have of speaking on the American college, unhampered by the conditions of fact.

I do not mind saying here to you, that, in my judgment, the head of an American college ought to be an American in spirit, and that the college itself ought to be administered in accordance with the exigencies of our specific American life. I have been looking at the history of our college in this regard and with this object in mind. There was Witherspoon, for example, an American in a sense, and, I believe, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, but I think it would have been far wiser for him to have been born in this country. It would have strengthened his influence and given him power with the Alumni. (Laughter.) Then there is Dr. McCosh, who has been with us so long that we have come to regard him as one of ourselves, but it is pretty generally under-

stood that he was born in the old country. I am very glad to know that nobody ever ventured to say that I was born in the old country. Why, it is only a paltry matter of six hundred miles that kept me from being born in North Carolina, and even this youthful folly I have endeavored to atone for by taking very precious care that each of my six sons should be born under the stars and stripes. (Cheers.) I call them my collected works, by the way, when I get them all together, and as they happen to be British by descent and American by birth, I have always flattered myself that in this way I had solved the problem of international copyright. My friend, Dr. van Dyke, seems to have been cognizant of these facts, because I notice he forgot to send me a copy of his admirable sermon on Our National Sin of Literary Piracy. But, gentlemen, it is my nature to find comfort in disaster and, I think that possibly there is some advantage in having been treated as an alien. "*Forsan et haec olim meminisse juvabit*," "Memory even of this may bring joy in the distant years," as Sir John Bowen has beautifully rendered it. For it is manifest that there is more joy among the Alumni over the one President who has been naturalized than over the ninety-and-nine that needed no naturalization; (applause) and I have about come to the conclusion that I can very well afford to waive my claim to be among the ninety-and-nine. Yes, I am very free to say, that I think the head of an American college should be an American in spirit. We have our own problems to solve, our own questions to deal with; and the precedents of the old world cannot be the norm of the new. I think that it is the duty of the head of such a college to impress it upon those who are committed to his charge, that the franchises that have been bought with blood and bargained for by the stern arbitration of the sword, are a precious inheritance; that they are not seized of them in fee simple, but that it is their bounden duty to hand them down as an unincumbered estate to their children and their children's children. (Cheers.) If this is what you mean by being an American, I wish you to understand that I am an American through and through, second to none in my loyalty for your institutions and my love for the people among whom all the years of my manhood have been spent. (Applause.) And more than that, I believe that the American university must be conducted along the lines of his-

toric continuity and with reference to the special exigencies of our own people. There are some good things in Oxford, in Paris, in Edinburgh and in Berlin, but the typical American university will not be a simple imitation of any of these. Better a common country church than a clay model of Cologne Cathedral. Better a thousand times for us a roomy American college than a feeble German university. (Applause.)

And I shall not shrink from saying further, that we must keep Princeton a Christian college. It has somehow leaked out that I am a Presbyterian. (Laughter.) I have heard the same thing said of our President, Dr. van Dyke, and it is said that even Dr. Hall has very strong preferences in the same direction. I do not know how these gentlemen reply to this allegation, but I am accustomed to enter a special plea of confession and avoidance, to admit the fact, but to deny that it is attended with any *quasi*-criminal consequences; for there is no church broader in her catholicity, and I say it deliberately, than the one I belong to, and there is no church that has done more for learning or taken a deeper interest in the cause of higher education. But Princeton is too big to be sectarian (Applause.) I want you to understand that. We mean to administer the affairs of this college along the lines of our common Christianity, but we mean, likewise, to keep the confidence of the religious public if we can; we mean, that is to say, that when an Episcopalian comes to us and is under the supervision of his rector on Sunday, he shall not hear a philosophy taught him on Monday that undermines his faith in God. We mean that he shall have the universe opened to his view and that he shall deal with its facts and problems of life under theistic conceptions; this is something more than daily prayers in chapel, though we shall have them, too.

The management of Princeton College is a great trust, if I may say so without being misunderstood (laughter), and I hope it is unnecessary for me to say, that you will find me conservative enough, but that you will find me likewise a believer in a very progressive policy. (Applause.) We need more students in the first place. Well, we must trust to the Alumni for that. (Laughter.) We must address ourselves to the new conditions of life which are sure to come, and we may just as well get rid now as at any other time of the idea that a university means

simply a place for special research, or an aggregation of colleges, or a co-ordination of faculties or a series of professional schools. We shall have to deal mainly with under-graduates. We do not intend to make artists or attorneys, but we do mean to widen the area of graduate study; we mean to encourage special investigation; we mean to add department after department just as fast as we can do it. There are fields already ripe to the harvest, and Princeton must put in the sickle pretty soon or be content to be a gleaner by and by. Now, all this means money. We cannot do this unless we have larger endowments. I do not know what your ideas of a college president are, gentlemen, but I desire to say a word upon this subject, because I do not wish you to be disappointed in me. If the trustees have elected me with the idea that I feed upon patristic Greek in the forenoon and scholastic Latin in the afternoon, and by a special effort may be able to brace up for a baccalaureate sermon once a year, I am very sorry that they have elected me, because I believe that a college president ought to know an interest-coupon from a railway-ticket (laughter and applause), and that he ought to be able to understand a balance-sheet as well as to grade an examination-paper. (Applause.) I think I shall take very considerable interest in the finances of Princeton College, and, I believe, what is more, that the money is going to come. (Applause.) I am pretty sure that there are friends enough who will see to it that Princeton shall come behind Yale in no gift. (Cheers.)

But whether the money come or not I have invested my life in this institution, I have put myself at the service of this college and I want—and I somehow have the feeling, that I am going to get—the unhesitating support of the Alumni of New York. (Applause.)

And then there is another thing I want to say, and that is, that more and more Princeton must become the rallying-point of broad and generous sympathies. This means, that we must recognize, so far as they are good, all the elements that enter into our diversified university life. I have no opinion to give upon the question as to what relation the Alumni shall sustain to the management of college affairs, but I am pretty clear in one conviction and that is, that we must not treat the Alumni as a lot of customers who have bought learning at our shop. The solidarity of university life must be conserved and perpetuated beyond the

years of graduation ; and it is very natural that the graduates should feel that if their interest in their Alma Mater is to be enlisted, they ought to have something to do, because it is a law of nature that when an organism has no function it tends to atrophy. (Applause.) I think you must recognize, moreover, what some people do not perhaps understand, to wit, that there are a great many students who go to college with no intention of being either very hard students or very great scholars—that generalization has been forced upon me by a pretty large induction of facts. I am not prepared to say that it is better to have gone and loafed than never to have gone at all, but I do believe in the *genius loci* ; and I sympathize with Sir Joshua Reynolds when he says, that there is around every seminary of learning, an atmosphere of floating knowledge where every one can imbibe something peculiar to his own original conceptions. (Applause.) And to change the subject rather abruptly, I confess that if the evils that are alleged to exist in regard to inter-collegiate contests can be checked or abated, I can well believe that out of these brawny contests some of the very best elements of manhood may emerge. (Loud applause.)

I think we must do better work with our best men than we have done ; and that without raising the minimum of requirement for any we must raise the maximum of possibility for some. That is to say—though I express myself with great modesty here and do not commit myself or commit anybody else—I think it is not unlikely that in addition to the distinction between elective and required studies, there may come a time when in order to secure the best results, we shall have to recognize the distinction between “pass” and “honor” work. You see now what all this points to. We are running close-hauled with the starboard tacks aboard, and the university head-lands are just under the port bow. If the wind backs we will have to beat up, if it hauls, then we shall ease the sheet and sail free, but we will get there anyhow in either case.

Mr. Augustine Birrele says, in his charming way, that a man might live like a gentleman for a twelve-month on Hazlitt’s ideas. I am pretty sure that we all feel that our share of interest on Dr. McCosh’s mental capital gives us a very respectable philosophical competency. He has been the teacher of us all, and although I

never sat in his class-room, I have read his books quite as carefully as many of you. (Laughter.)

I shall enter upon the work of administering the affairs of Princeton College in Dr. McCosh's spirit. (Applause.) I shall probably have my own notions, and they may be right or wrong; I may turn out to be a very poor architect, but I give you warning that I am not willing to be installed simply as a caretaker. I look for progress and growth; but one thing I will say: no man shall ever take the crown from Dr. McCosh's head with my consent. (Applause.) If it shall be my privilege to witness the growing glory of Princeton through a succession of years, and from time to time conduct some distinguished visitor across our campus and through our halls; I promise you, gentlemen, that when I shall have pointed to the names of fifty Fellows on the catalogue, all pursuing special topics of investigation; when I shall have shown him our new dormitories, our new Gymnasium and our new Commencement Hall; when I shall have introduced him to those gentlemen who, in addition to the men that are now the glory of Princeton, will then be adding to her fame in poetry, in criticism, in history, in pure science, in pure philosophy, in comparative philology, in political economy, in historical and philosophical jurisprudence, I will take him to the place where Dr. McCosh's portrait hangs and I will say to him: He is the inspiration of it all. (Cheers and prolonged applause.)



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